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PRESIDENCY COLLEGE CENTENARY

1855—1955

CENTENARY COMMEMORATION MEETING

JUNE 15, 1955: 6 P.M.

Recd from the Principal
Presidency College prepaid on
16.9.55 vide L.Ry. file no. 2L-3/55
Price - Not mentioned.

33030

Presidency College Centenary
1855—1955

Centenary Commemoration Meeting
June 15, 1955: 6 p.m.

President—

Rashtrapati Dr. Rajendra Prasad

Inauguration by—

Acharya Dr. Jadunath Sarkar

PROGRAMME

1. Vedic Hymn (by Dr. Gaurinath Shastri).
2. Hymn: *Sangachahhadhvam*.....(by students of the College).
3. Garlanding.
4. Inaugural Address by Acharya Dr. Jadunath Sarkar.
5. Principal's Address.
6. Address by the Visitor of the College (Rajyapal Dr. Harendra Coomar Mookerjee).
7. Presidential address by Rashtrapati Dr. Rajendra Prasad.
8. Vote of thanks.
9. Song: *Janaganamana*.....

The Principal's Address

RASHTRAPATI DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD, RAJYAPAL DR. HARENDRA COOMAR MOOKERJEE, ACHARYA DR. JADUNATH SARKAR, MEMBERS OF THE COLLEGE: PAST AND PRESENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

It is a great thing for a man-made institution to weather the storms of a hundred years and survive; greater still, when it not only survives but grows in course of hundred years to a magnitude and significance far beyond any at the start. Presidency College, which is a century old in its present name but actually 138 years old as an institution, had, when we think of it now, such a small beginning. It started as the Hindu College on the 20th January, 1817, with only twenty students on its rolls in a rented house on Upper Chitpore Road. Think of that humble beginning, and think of Presidency College as it is now—an institution that might well have been a university—the nursery of the intellect of Bengal, and you are inevitably reminded of the prophecy made on the day following the foundation of the Hindu College by its "Native Secretary", as he was called, Buddinath Mukherjee, that "the school, which yet was but a seedling, would many years hence resemble the banyan tree, which when fully grown was the largest of trees in India, cooling and refreshing all those who came under its shade". That prophecy has fulfilled itself to the letter in the last 138 years.

Let us, on an occasion like this, remember and salute those early pioneers associated with the foundation of the Hindu College and those responsible for its subsequent conversion into

Presidency College. Among the founders of the Hindu College were David Hare, Raja Rammohan Ray, Maharaja Tejchandra Bahadur of Burdwan, Gopeemohan Tagore, Buddinath Mukherjee, Gopeemohan Deb, Joykrishna Sinha, Radhamadhab Banerji, Ganganarayan Das, Sir Edward Hyde East, Joseph Barretto; among the benefactors, whose munificence made the existence and continuance of the institution possible, were, besides the Maharaja of Burdwan and Gopeemohan Tagore just named, Raja Buddinath Roy, Harinath Roy, and Kalishankar Ghosal. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of their work. The Hindu College was the first institution in India to impart western education on an organised scale. If in India today we are what and where we are largely because of western education, these founders and benefactors of the Hindu College must be placed among the makers of modern India. One's admiration for their work becomes all the greater when one remembers the forces they were up against. Thus, Raja Rammohan Ray, though in full sympathy with the Hindu College scheme, had to refrain from appearing publicly in its support for fear of "alarming the prejudices of his orthodox countrymen and thus marring the whole cause". He did alarm, nonetheless. A Bengali lampoon of the time speaks of the Brahmin of Khanakul (the Raja was born near this place) having founded a school that bids fair to cut at the roots of caste! The unknown writer was wiser than he knew.

Again, when in 1827 the Government granted the Hindu College accommodation in the two wings of the newly built building for the Sanskrit College, special arrangements had to be made to prevent contact between the scholars of the two institutions, the orthodox and the heterodox, by means of a wall with iron rails on top separating either wing from the central block which housed the Sanskrit College! Ideas, however, cannot be held back by barriers, and those that the Hindu College stood for spread across walls and rails and swiftly conquered the entire country.

If any one among the founders of the Hindu College has to be singled out for particular mention, it is David Hare. It was this great-hearted Scotch watch-maker, who made Calcutta his

home and came to love the country and its people as his own, who first mooted the idea of an advanced English school for the city, and the scheme he drew up led to the foundation of the Hindu College. If, then, David Hare was the real founder of Hindu College, Dr. F. J. Mouat and Rasamoy Datta might claim the same distinction in relation to Presidency College. The birth of Presidency College was, curiously enough, an offshoot of a brush that occurred in 1852 between the students of the Calcutta Madrassah and their Principal, Dr. Sprenger. It is remarkable what leads to what in human affairs. Dr. F. J. Mouat, then Secretary to the Council of Education (forerunner of the Directorate of Public Instruction of today), whose name, incidentally, is commemorated in the Mouat Medal still awarded by the Calcutta University, was appointed to hold an enquiry. In his report he stressed the desirability of a general "Metropolitan College", open to all classes and creeds, unlike the sectarian Madrassah and Hindu College. The establishment of a new general college, added Dr. Mouat, would however stifle the Hindu College, and it was better that the Hindu College itself should be changed into a public institution open to all. The Government accepted Dr. Mouat's suggestion and formally proposed the transformation of the Senior Department of the Hindu College into a full-fledged Government institution open to all and re-named "the Presidency College", "in order to distinguish it by name from all merely local and private institutions, and in order to give it an official character". If the initial move in the matter came from Dr. Mouat, the actual change-over owed not a little to Rasamoy Datta. This "able and enlightened gentleman", as Dr. Mouat describes him, was Honorary Secretary to the Hindu College from 1841 to 1854; later he became a member of the Council of Education and a Judge of the Calcutta Small Cause Court (the first Indian to be appointed a Judge of that Court). It was largely due to his enthusiastic support of the Government proposals that the management of the Hindu College were persuaded to hand over the institution to the Government, despite initial reluctance on their part. Along with the founders and benefactors of the Hindu College, these two gentlemen, Dr. F. J. Mouat and Rasamoy Datta, have a place of their own in the history of education in modern India.

Looking down the vista of a century, one watches the long and glorious history of Presidency College pass in a panorama before one's eyes—the Senior Department of the Hindu College closing down on the 15th April, 1854, and re-opening informally as the Presidency College on the 15th June, 1854; the change formalised, on receipt of sanction from the Court of Directors of the East India Company, on the 15th June, 1855; the first two graduates passing out in 1858, one of them being no less a figure than Bankim Chandra Chatterji; the construction of the present main building of the College between 1872 and 1874; the gift of the turret clock by Nafarchandra Pal Chowdhuri shortly after; the Eden Hindu Hostel, built earlier out of public subscription, taken over by the Government in 1895; the beginnings of modern scientific research in India in the laboratories of the College under the aegis of Sir Alexander Pedler, Acharya Jagadishchandra Bose and Acharya Praphullachandra Ray; the long line of great Presidency College teachers, beginning with James Sutcliffe, the first Principal, down to Praphullachandra Ghosh; the founding of the first Seminar in 1896 and of the first College Union[1] and the first College Magazine round about 1905; the construction of the Baker Laboratories between 1910 and 1913; the construction of the new Astronomical Observatory and the extension of the College campus between 1927 and 1930, till the College area spread, as Principal James had envisaged it, from College Street on one side to the neighbourhood of Halliday Park on the other. In the thirties and early forties of the present century the College was threatened with serious deterioration of standards due to the unsound policy of the Government of the time. Then came Independence, to the struggle for which Presidency College had contributed so many of her alumni and teachers—the seer of *Bande Mataram;* Anandamohan Basu; Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das; Rashtrapati

[1] Incidentally, our distinguished President of to-day was elected Secretary to the first College Union.

Rajendra Prasad; Netaji Subhaschandra Basu; Saratchandra Basu; Acharya Praphullachandra Ray; Sir Asutosh Mookerjee; Satishchandra Das Gupta; Dr. Praphullachandra Ghosh; Nripendrachandra Banerji; Ullaskar Datta; the martyrs Sushilchandra Sen and Santoshkumar Mitra; and many others. After August 15, 1947, the College was free to work in a healthier atmosphere. The years since 1947 have been marked by structural additions to the Baker Laboratory and the opening of new departments of study. The number of students on the rolls on the 15th June, 1854, was 101; in this centenary year, it is 1,219.

But I have not touched yet on the most remarkable feature of this long and glorious history of the College. Every year of this century of her existence Presidency College, like its predecessor, the Hindu College, has sent out men of sterling worth and distinction to the various walks of Indian life—the arts and the sciences, law, politics and administration, education and social service. They are so many, these distinguished alumni of Presidency College, that their names alone would fill a large volume. That fact alone is a measure of the significance of the College in the intellectual history of modern India. Not many colleges in the world can boast of having contributed so many names to a country's scroll of honour.

One particular feature of the history of Presidency College has gone on repeating itself throughout the century under review. The growth of the College has always outrun the available accommodation. This was so at the beginning; this is so at the present moment. Starting where the Hindu College had been, in the two wings of the Sanskrit College building, Presidency College presently outgrew that accommodation, and the problem of space was a real headache for the authorities of the day till the present main building of the College was put up in 1874. By the end of the century the College had outgrown even its new edifice, thanks to the rapid expansion of its science departments. By 1907, while H. R. James was Principal of the College, it was felt that the problem of accommodation could no longer be ignored, and a comprehensive plan for all-round expansion of the College was drawn up and formally approved

in a conference presided over by the then Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. As a result the Baker Laboratories were put up in 1913. Then came the first World War and the remainder of the 1907 plan went by the board. Thanks to a further push given by Principal H. E. Stapleton, the new Astronomical Observatory was built and the boundaries of the College campus were extended during 1927-30. Yet to this day many parts of the 1907 plan remain unrealised—for example, an Assembly Hall, the lack of which is poignantly felt every time some meeting or function is held at the College (the centenary functions, for instance, have to be held in a specially erected *pandal*).

Since 1913 the College has been expanding in many directions, especially in its science departments, with no corresponding increase in available accommodation. New subjects have been taken on (e.g., Statistics, Geography, Zoology); departments have multiplied; the College library has grown steadily till it has reached a total of more than 85,000 volumes of books and periodicals; teaching and administrative staff has increased; so has the number of students on the rolls (and for the last ten years the College has been admitting women students to its degree classes). Moreover, for the last five years, while Presidency College students have been attending their Sanskrit and Pali classes at Sanskrit College, Sanskrit College students have been attending their classes in all other Arts subjects at Presidency College. All these have made heavy demands on the existing accommodation with the result that all departments of the College are badly cramped for space, the position being the worst in the Science Departments which have to take up, in addition to normal teaching and research work, various research schemes sponsored by the State Government and different bodies under the Central Government. Even the recent structural additions to the Baker Laboratories and the removal of the Indian Statistical Institute to its own building elsewhere have hardly improved matters. History has repeated itself; "more space" is once again the cry of the hour.

In the last few years we felt that unless this pressing problem of accommodation was tackled in right earnest, the activities of

the College in its various departments might come to a dead end. The 1907 example was before us, and it was time, we felt, that another comprehensive plan for all-round expansion of the College was drawn up and put into effect. We did draw up such a plan and submit it to the Government in 1953. Nothing yet has been heard in the matter from the authorities.

I should be failing in my duty to my College if I did not mention one other matter. A very high destiny was envisaged for this institution in the original Government plan for the transformation of the Senior Department of the Hindu College into the Presidency College. The Government Note on the subject, dated 21st October, 1853, very clearly envisaged the future of Presidency College as the nucleus of a university. Most unfortunately, the College was prevented from fulfilling that high destiny appointed for her by being successively shorn of her Law, Engineering and Commerce Departments and finally of her Post-Graduate classes. The new University Act passed in 1951 contains a provision for constituent colleges, i.e., colleges capable of teaching up to the post-graduate stage, and Presidency College has been declared one such. But nothing, unfortunately, has yet been done to implement the declaration. On this solemn centenary day, which necessarily reminds us of all that the country owes to Presidency College and of what she expects of us in return, here are two demands we make on our national government: first, that the plan we submitted in 1953 for all-round expansion of the College be accepted and put into effect with the least possible delay; second, that immediate steps be taken towards resumption of post-graduate teaching at Presidency College. Our College must in future, as I visualise it, develop into a research institution in Arts and Science subjects; the revival of post-graduate teaching is a necessary stage in that development.

Turning to the centenary celebrations which start today, I must offer my heart-felt thanks to all those members of the College, past and present, whose unwearied labours and enthusiastic co-operation have made the celebrations possible. The Presidency College Alumni Association, now in the fifth

year of an extremely useful existence, have rendered yeomans service in the matter. Members of the various committees that have been set up in connexion with the centenary celebrations have all worked hard in the cause. In planning for the celebrations we have stuck to the original date, the 15th of June, when the Senior Department of Hindu College re-opened as Presidency College; though some were in favour of holding the celebrations in winter because of the more favourable weather. All those who have worked hard for the success of the celebrations have done so cheerfully in extremely trying weather.

Grateful thanks are also due to those who have helped us with loans of pictures, portraits, blocks and documents in connexion with the centenary or by permitting photographs to be taken of portraits, etc., in their charge or possession. A special word of thanks is due to the Press for the excellent co-operation we have been receiving from them all along. Our thanks are also due to the officers of the West Bengal Government Press for the interest they have been taking in all printing work in connexion with the centenary. Of the two volumes planned for as part of the centenary programme, viz., the Centenary Volume and the second volume of the Register of Ex-students, the first is in the Press. This is being edited by Dr. S. C. Sen Gupta, Professor S. C. Sarkar and Professor T. N. Sen, and will contain the history of the College, an account of its activities in the last hundred years, and a large number of plates relating to the past history of the College; we hope to be able to publish it shortly. As for the second volume of the Register of Ex-students, which will contain the records of ex-students after 1925 (at which year the first volume, published in 1927, left off), it will take some more time to bring it out, for not all ex-students have yet responded to our appeal for information. As already arranged, copies of the two volumes, when published, will be sent free to those who have contributed Rs.25 or more to the centenary funds.

It is certainly a most noteworthy fact that all the funds needed for the centenary celebrations have been subscribed by members of the College, past and present. The celebrations will cost us Rs. 20,000 approximately. The bulk of this amount has been

contributed by old students, who have thus shown how dearly they still love their *alma mater*. Our most grateful thanks are due to all donors. We hope to be left with a surplus after meeting all the expenses of the celebrations, with which we have planned to endow a number of Centenary Scholarships and Prizes for students and research workers at this College.

Finally, I must thank all those who have attended this commemoration meeting. On behalf of the College I extend to them a most cordial welcome and invitation to participate in each item on the published programme of the celebrations—the Arts and Science Exhibitions; the debates; the sports; the musical and dramatic performances by students of the College, past and present; and the Re-Union on the 19th of June. On behalf of the College I offer our most respectful thanks to our most distinguished old boy, Rashtrapati Dr. Rajendra Prasad, whom we have the honour to welcome a second time to his old College (the first was in December, 1952), and who has been gracious enough to have come all the way from Panchmarhi to preside over the centenary of his beloved College; to our Visitor, Rajyapal Dr. Harendra Coomar Mookerjee, yet another distinguished old boy, who has graced the occasion with his presence; and to Acharya Dr. Jadunath Sarkar, one of the oldest and most distinguished of our ex-students and ex-Professors living, who has kindly inaugurated this evening's proceedings. I am sure you would all join with me when, on this great centenary day, I wish to our dear old College, on behalf of you all, a future even more glorious than her past. As I look at this queen of colleges in the hundredth year of her existence, I, as a member of the institution, feel like echoing those words of Shakespeare:

"Thy eternal summer shall not fade."

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